

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF DELAWARE

MATTHEW JONES,

Plaintiff,

v.

KENT COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT,
DELAWARE,

Defendant.

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Civil Action No. 17-394-RGA

Matthew Jones, Greenwood, Delaware. Pro Se Plaintiff.

MEMORANDUM OPINION

June / , 2017
Wilmington, Delaware


ANDREWS, U.S. District Judge:

Plaintiff Matthew Jones, who appears *pro se* and has been granted leave to proceed *in forma pauperis*, filed this action in March 2017 in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania against the Superior Court of the State of Delaware in and for Kent County. The matter was transferred to this Court on April 10, 2017. (D.I. 4). Jones asserts jurisdiction by reason of a United States government defendant, a federal question, and federal diversity. (D.I. 1-1 at 2). The Court proceeds to screen the Complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

BACKGROUND

Jones alleges that on January 31, 2017, after his mother called Recovery Innovations and the Delaware State Police arrived at their home, he was taken for a psychiatric evaluation. He was arrested and held at the Seaford Nanticoke Hospital for over 12 hours and transported to Recovery Innovations. Jones alleges that the Nanticoke Hospital could find no reason to hold him when the hold expired, but Recovery Innovations (who diagnosed Jones as schizophrenic) said a hold had been placed by the Delaware State Police. Jones has filed a separate lawsuit against Recovery Innovations, Civ. A. No. 17-396-RGA (D. Del. Apr. 11, 2017).

Jones was held at Recovery Innovations for approximately 24 hours and transferred to Dover Behavioral Health where he was held involuntarily until February 22, 2017. Two court hearings were held at the Kent County Superior Court during this time. Jones was unable to attend the hearings. He states that an order was entered for him to continue treatment for schizophrenia, take medication, and see a psychiatrist.

Jones states that there “are no doctors or court personnel locally” and that “all are represented by identity thieves who normally do not age” and “many have shabby, unbelievable names.” (D.I. 1-1 at 3).

Jones alleges numerous violations of federal criminal law, Delaware State law, and amendments of the United States Constitution. (*Id.* at 4-7). He seeks two billion dollars in damages.

DISCUSSION

A federal court may properly dismiss an action *sua sponte* under the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B) if “the action is frivolous or malicious, fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.” *Ball v. Famiglio*, 726 F.3d 448, 452 (3d Cir. 2013); *see also* 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (*in forma pauperis* actions). The Court must accept all factual allegations in a complaint as true and take them in the light most favorable to a *pro se* plaintiff. *Phillips v. County of Allegheny*, 515 F.3d 224, 229 (3d Cir. 2008).

An action is frivolous if it “lacks an arguable basis either in law or in fact.” *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 325 (1989). Under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i), a court may dismiss a complaint as frivolous if it is “based on an indisputably meritless legal theory” or a “clearly baseless” or “fantastic or delusional” factual scenario. *Neitzke*, 490 U.S. at 327-28; *Wilson v. Rackmill*, 878 F.2d 772, 774 (3d Cir. 1989).

The legal standard for dismissing a complaint for failure to state a claim pursuant to § 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) is identical to the legal standard used when ruling on Rule 12(b)(6)

motions. *Tourscher v. McCullough*, 184 F.3d 236, 240 (3d Cir. 1999) (applying Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(6) standard to dismissal for failure to state a claim under § 1915(e)(2)(B)). However, before dismissing a complaint or claims for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted pursuant to the screening provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915, the Court must grant Plaintiff leave to amend his complaint unless amendment would be inequitable or futile. See *Grayson v. Mayview State Hosp.*, 293 F.3d 103, 114 (3d Cir. 2002).

Plaintiff proceeds *pro se* and, therefore, his pleading is liberally construed and his complaint, “however inartfully pleaded, must be held to less stringent standards than formal pleadings drafted by lawyers.” *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007). Under Rule 12(b)(6), a motion to dismiss may be granted only if, accepting the well-pleaded allegations in the complaint as true and viewing them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff, a court concludes that those allegations “could not raise a claim of entitlement to relief.” *Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly*, 550 U.S. 544, 558 (2007). “Though ‘detailed factual allegations’ are not required, a complaint must do more than simply provide ‘labels and conclusions’ or ‘a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action.’” *Davis v. Abington Mem’l Hosp.*, 765 F.3d 236, 241 (3d Cir. 2014) (quoting *Twombly*, 550 U.S. at 555). In addition, a plaintiff must plead facts sufficient to show that a claim has substantive plausibility. See *Johnson v. City of Shelby*, ___ U.S. ___, 135 S.Ct. 346, 347 (2014). A complaint may not be dismissed, however, for imperfect statements of the legal theory supporting the claim asserted. See *id.* at 346.

When reviewing the sufficiency of a complaint, a court should follow a three-step process: (1) consider the elements necessary to state a claim; (2) identify allegations that are merely conclusions and therefore are not well-pleaded factual allegations; and (3) accept any well-pleaded factual allegations as true and determine whether they plausibly state a claim. See *Connelly v. Lane Constr. Corp.*, 809 F.3d 780, 787 (3d Cir. 2016); *Williams v. BASF Catalysts LLC*, 765 F.3d 306, 315 (3d Cir. 2014). Deciding whether a claim is plausible will be a “context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense.” *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662, 679 (2009).

The sole defendant is the Superior Court in and for Kent County, Delaware. The Eleventh Amendment protects states and their agencies and departments from suit in federal court regardless of the kind of relief sought. *Pennhurst State School & Hosp. v. Halderman*, 465 U.S. 89, 100 (1984). “Absent a state’s consent, the Eleventh Amendment bars a civil rights suit in federal court that names the state as a defendant.” *Laskaris v. Thornburgh*, 661 F.2d 23, 25 (3d Cir. 1981). Delaware has not waived its immunity from suit in federal court; although Congress can abrogate a state’s sovereign immunity, it did not do so through the enactment of 42 U.S.C. § 1983. See *Brooks-McCollum v. Delaware*, 213 F. App’x 92, 94 (3d Cir. 2007).

Following the reasoning of the Third Circuit in *Benn v. First Judicial Dist. of Pa.*, the Court concludes that the Superior Court is a state entity and, thus, immune from suit. *Benn*, 426 F.3d 233, 239-40 (3d Cir. 2005) (concluding that Pennsylvania’s First Judicial District is a state entity entitled to Eleventh Amendment immunity). In addition,

dismissal is proper because Defendant is not a person for purposes of § 1983. See *Will v. Michigan Dep't of State Police*, 491 U.S. 58, 71 (1989); *Calhoun v. Young*, 288 F. App'x 47 (3d Cir. 2008). Finally, after thoroughly reviewing the Complaint and applicable law, the Court draws on its judicial experience and common sense and finds that the claims raised by Jones are frivolous. Therefore, the Court will dismiss the Complaint as frivolous and based upon the Superior Court's immunity from suit pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B)(i) and (iii).

CONCLUSION

For the above reasons, the Court will dismiss the Complaint pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B) (i) and (iii). The Court finds amendment futile.

An appropriate order will be entered.